IN THE SPECIFICATION:

Please replace Paragraph [0057] (the only full paragraph on page 28), with the following rewritten paragraph:

The peripheral zone and the central area of the prospective image of backlight are divided into sections S1 to S4 and sections S5 to ~~S11~~ S13, respectively, and the mean value of brightness of each section is calculated. If the mean values of brightness of the central area are lower than the mean values of brightness of the peripheral zone, the prospective image of backlight is determined to be of backlight. As described above, various kinds of algorithm can be adopted for the identification of images of backlight. On the other hand, if a natural normal-light image with bright letters in its peripheral zone is checked by the algorithm of Fig. 5, the image may be determined to be of backlight.

Please replace Paragraph [0058] (the paragraph spanning pages 28 and 29), with the following rewritten paragraph:

As described above, if a natural image containing an artificial image or images undergoes various examinations without excluding the artificial image or images from the natural image, the examinations may bring about wrong results. Accordingly, wrong judgments due to artificial images are prevented in the present invention by the process in Step S110. In this embodiment, there are Step S115 (extraction of artificial images) and Step ~~120~~ S120 (checkup for images of backlight) in addition to Step S105 (checkup for images of backlight) to prevent wrong judgments about backlight as shown in Fig. 5.

Please replace Paragraph [0060] (the last full paragraph on page 29), with the following rewritten paragraph:

The backlight-image-checkup module 21b excludes the RGB data of artificial images from the RGB image data 15a based on the data 15c on the positions of artificial images and determines whether the natural image is of backlight or not in Step S120. If the natural image is determined to be of backlight according to the process in Step S125, it undergoes backlight-revising processing in Step S130. If the natural image is determined to be of normal light, the processing jumps to Step S135.

Please replace Paragraph [0070] (the only full paragraph on page 34), with the following rewritten paragraph:

If the pixels are determined to be in one and the same color in Step S235, the data about the positions of those pixels are stored in the HDD 15 as data 15c on positions of artificial images in Step S240. If the pixels are determined to be in different colors in Step S235, the processing jumps to Step S245. In Step S245, it is determined whether or not all the prospective artificial images underwent the above color determining processing. The processes in and after Step S230 are repeated until it is determined that all the prospective artificial images have undergone the color determining processing. According to the above processing, the artificial images are extracted from the RGB image data 15a and the data 15c on the positions of the artificial images are prepared.

Please replace Paragraph [0072] (the only full paragraph on page 35), with the following rewritten paragraph:

In the second embodiment, a part of the construction of the artificial-image-extracting module 210c is different from the one in the above first embodiment. Other constructions, namely, the module construction of PRTDRV 21 in Fig. 1 and the construction of the coordinates-comparing unit 24a are the same as those in the first embodiment. The above artificial-image-extracting module 210c has a specific color-determining unit 240b ~~in stead~~ instead of the color-determining unit ~~240b~~ 24b. The specific color-determining unit 240b determines whether pixels in each of areas appearing uniform to human eyes are in a prescribed specific color or not.

Please replace Paragraph [0073] (the paragraph that spans pages 35 and 36), with the following rewritten paragraph:

For this purpose, the specific color-determining unit 240b has a successive-pixel extractor 240b1, which refers to the edge image data 15b and extracts portions therein comprising successive pixels regarded as "1" and an area surrounded by the successive portions. Namely, when the coordinates-comparing unit 24a prepares the edge image data 15b by the same processing as in the first embodiments, extracts prospective artificial images and gives information on the positions of the prospective artificial images to the specific color-determining unit 240b, the successive-pixel extractor ~~24b1~~ 240b1 extracts the uniform prospective artificial areas.

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claim 1 (Currently Amended): An image processing method comprising:

an image-data acquiring procedure acquiring image data by which an image is represented with a plurality of pixels;

an artificial-image extracting procedure extracting a ~~portion being image data characterizing an artificial image from the image represented by said acquired image data~~ plurality of portions as prospective artificial images, each including a plurality of successive pixels of a specific color, and extracting the prospective artificial images as the portions being image data characterizing the artificial images if ordinates or abscissas of their edges are coincident; and

an image processing procedure excluding the portion of the artificial image extracted from said acquired image data in the artificial-image extracting procedure and performing prescribed image processing.

Claim 2 (Canceled).

Claim 3 (Original): An image processing method as set forth in claim 1, wherein said artificial-image extracting procedure includes extracting a portion consisting of a plurality of successive pixels of the same color.

Claim 4 (Canceled).

Claim 5 (Original): An image processing method as set forth in claim 1, wherein said image processing procedure grasps tendencies of gradation of the image based on said image data and, when the tendencies of gradation is not in accord with prescribed desirable tendencies of gradation, revises the tendencies of gradation of the image by revising the gradients of each pixel.

Claim 6 (Original): An image processing method as set forth in claim 1, wherein said image processing procedure includes backlight-revising processing increasing brightness of a darker part of the image.

Claim 7 (Original): An image processing method as set forth in either of the procedures in claim 1, wherein the image processing method comprises a backlight-image-checkup procedure determining whether the image data acquired in said image data acquiring procedure is of backlight or not by using prescribed algorithm, and said artificial-image extracting procedure and image-processing procedure are given to the image data which are determined to be of backlight in the backlight-image-checkup procedure.

Claim 8 (Original): An image processing method as set forth in claim 1;

wherein the image processing method comprises a procedure for determining the kinds of images which determines whether an image represented by the image data acquired in said image-data acquiring procedure is a natural image or not, and

wherein said artificial-image extracting procedure and image processing procedure are applied to the image data which is determined to be the natural image in said procedure for determining the kinds of images.

Claim 9 (Original): An image processing method as set forth in claim 1;

wherein said artificial-image extracting procedure calculates the quantity of a characteristic of the artificial image from the acquired image data characterizing the artificial image; and

wherein the image represented by the image data is extracted as an artificial image when the calculated quantity of the characteristic is close to the reference quantity of the characteristic stored in a prescribed storage medium in advance.

Claim 10 (Currently Amended): An image processing apparatus acquiring image data by which an image is represented with a plurality of pixels and performing image processing, comprising:

an artificial-image extractor extracting a ~~portion being image data characterizing an artificial image from the image represented by said acquired image data~~ plurality of portions as prospective artificial images, each including a plurality of successive pixels of a specific color, and extracting the prospective artificial images as the portions being image data characterizing the artificial images if ordinates or abscissas of their edges are coincident; and

an image processor excluding the image data of the portion extracted from said acquired image data by the artificial-image extractor and performing prescribed image processing.

Claim 11 (Currently Amended): A computer-readable storage medium encoded with ~~An image-processing program product~~ a computer program for acquiring image data by which an image is expressed with a plurality of pixels from a prescribed storage medium and processing the image data, ~~comprising~~ the computer program comprising computer-executable instructions causing a computer to execute the following:

an image-data acquiring procedure acquiring image data by which an image is expressed with a plurality of pixels;

an artificial-image extracting procedure extracting a ~~portion being image data characterizing an artificial image from the image represented by said acquired image data~~ plurality of portions as prospective artificial images, each including a plurality of successive pixels of a specific color, and extracting the prospective artificial images as the portions being image data characterizing the artificial images if ordinates or abscissas of their edges are coincident; and

an image processing procedure excluding the image data of the portion extracted from said acquired image data by the artificial-image extracting function and performing a prescribed image processing.